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which suits so well with the tory notions of Johnson, and which our modern Anti-Jacobins would be desirous to promulgate as our charter.

K.

To the Proprietors of the Belfast Magazine.

THE reason of my now addressing you, is in consequence of seeing in Mr. Nicholson's Philosophical Journal, for June last, an account of a Life-boat, which so exactly answers in the general plan to that described in your Magazine, for January, 1809, vol. 2, page 36, that I am induced, (being the writer of that article) to lay claim to the *priority of invention*. Indeed, so similar is the plan proposed by Mr. Bremner, to that given in your Magazine, that it comes within the limits of possibility, that he may have seen the directions there published.

I have long been convinced of the practicability of my plan, by a series of experiments made many years ago, but never thought of making it public, until reading in your Magazine, the account of the shipwreck at Ballycastle, vol. 1, page 268, where had any one thought of equipping a common boat, with three or four empty twenty gallon casks, and a little heavy ballast, well secured from shifting, there is great reason to suppose, the crew might have reached the shore in safety. More than two years have elapsed since your publication made known my plan, which was also, at my instance, inserted in the Belfast News-Letter, from the desire of rendering more extended, what I was persuaded would be useful information, and might be successfully employed whenever such a melancholy scene as that described at Ballycastle, presented itself.

My object was to show that a boat may be made ready, when wanted, without any previous preparation, and even where corkwood is not to be procured. Where every thing can be had, and money is at command, I am convinced that Mr. Christopher Towill's boat (a description of which terminated my former communication) is that which should be adopted in preference to any I have yet seen described. It never entered my mind that an honorary medal or any other emolument would follow my plan; if it should ever be the means of rescuing a single individual from death, I would then receive an ample reward.

Your humble Servant,

JOHN TEMPLETON.

Belfast, November 5, 1811.

To the Proprietors of the Belfast Magazine.

BEING at the Irish Forum in May last, when the question for discussion was, "Whether punishment for death should be abolished," the following ideas occurred to me, which I immediately committed to paper, on my return home. Your giving them a place in your useful miscellany, will oblige (whom you will occasionally hear from) your obedient,

HUGUES.

Dublin, 14th July, 1811.

CONSIDERATIONS ON PUNISHING CRIMES BY DEATH.

IS it possible, without shuddering with horror, to reflect on the periodical havock of our fellow-beings, made by the laws of these countries for the commission of crimes?

Death is of dreadful things the most dreadful, yet there is scarcely an of-

fence against society, for which the forfeit of life is not the atonement.

But the punishment of death is not authorised by any right, it is therefore a war of a whole nation against a Citizen, whose destruction they think necessary for the general good.

The experience of all ages may be sufficient to prove, that the punishment of death has never prevented determined men from injuring society. This method has been long tried, but with so little success, that rapine and violence are daily encreasing. The prisons of these kingdoms (which are periodically emptied into the grave, and again filled to add new victims to sanguinary justice) is a melancholy proof of this assertion.

Must we go to the end of the world, must we have recourse to the laws of China, to learn how frugal we ought to be of human blood? It is now more than four thousand years that the tribunals of that empire have existed, and during that time the meanest subject, at the extremity of the empire, has not been executed, without first transmitting his case to the Emperor, who causes it to be thrice examined by one of his tribunals, after which he signs the death-warrant, alters the sentence, or entirely acquits.

During the 20 years reign of Elizabeth, Empress of Russia,* not a criminal was executed. Catherine 2d, who succeeded her, with much more genius, followed her example. Yet crimes were not multiplied by this humanity; and it generally happens, that the criminals sent to Siberia, in time become worthy members of society.

The countries and times most noted for severity of punishment, were

always those in which the most bloody inhuman actions, and the most atrocious crimes were committed, for the hands of the legislature and assassin were directed by the same sanguinary spirit.

The punishment of death is pernicious to society, from the example of barbarism it affords. If passions, or the necessities of war, have taught men to shed the blood of their fellow-creatures, the laws which are intended to moderate the ferocity of mankind, should not exercise it by examples of barbarity, the more horrible as this punishment is usually attended with formal pageantry. Is it not absurd, that the laws that punish homicide, should, in order to prevent murder, publicly commit it themselves? What are the natural sentiments of every person concerning the punishment of death? We may read them in the contempt and indignation with which every one looks on the Executioner, who is nevertheless an innocent executor of the public will. What then is the origin of this contradiction? It is, that in a secret corner of the mind, in which nature's original impressions are still preserved, men discover a sentiment which tells them, that their lives are not lawfully in the power of any one, but of that necessity only, which, with his iron sceptre, rules the universe.

If an equal punishment be ordained for two crimes that injure society in different degrees, there is nothing to deter men from committing the greater, as often as it is attended with greater advantage.

To equal robbery with murder, is to confound in common minds the gradations of iniquity, and to incite to the commission of a greater crime, to prevent the detection of a less.

He who knows not how often rigorous laws produce total impunity,

* Voltaire.

and how many crimes are concealed and forgotten, for fear of hurrying the offender to that state in which there is no repentance, has conversed very little with the world. They who would rejoice at the conviction of a thief, are yet shocked at the thoughts of taking his life. His crime sinks to nothing, when compared with his misery, and severity defeats itself, by exciting pity.

All laws against wickedness are ineffectual, unless some will inform, and some will prosecute; but till we mitigate the penalties for mere violations of property, information will always be hated, and prosecution dreaded. The heart of a good man cannot but recoil at the thought of punishing a slight injury with death, especially when he remembers that the thief might have procured safety by another crime, from which he was restrained by his remaining virtue.

Independently of its inhumanity, of its inutility, and of every other consideration, one important, and, in my opinion, singly sufficient reason, why the punishment of death should never be inflicted, is the possibility of the innocence of the sufferer, and the impossibility of reversing his sentence, should that afterwards appear, but which all the remorse and contrition of the prosecutor and judges, can never restore again to his unhappy family, and to society. The unfortunate sufferer can then receive no compensation for the horrid injury he has sustained, he has not the consolation of seeing his innocence manifested to his country, and his character rescued from infamy.

The only difference our laws ordained between the punishment for the most atrocious murder, and the theft of five shillings, is, ordering the criminal in the first case, to be executed within 48 hours, and his body

to be anatomized: in the second, perhaps the unfortunate victim may get a few days or weeks longer, and his body delivered to his friends, if he should be so fortunate as to have any, to pay the last duties to his remains.

According to the existing laws of America, robbery is not punishable with death, and only in particular instances is murder or forgery. The punishment inflicted is imprisonment, some 7—14—21 years, or during life, according to the enormity of the crime, by which means hundreds of useful members are made, or preserved to society. In those prisons different trades are carried on, and when a man is put into them, he is obliged to make choice of one, whether he is able to support himself or not, and by this means many idle vagrants, after being confined a few years, grow industrious, good tradesmen, and able to support themselves in comfort, after their enlargement.

Punishments of this kind are certainly more useful than death or transportation, in preventing the commission of crimes; as by this means there is a perpetual example before us, while, in case of death, it is merely temporary. The idea of perpetual imprisonment is dreadful enough, but then, in case of the innocence of the person being proved, (as it has often happened) then he can be restored to his family and society, and his character and his name snatched from infamy.

For the Belfast Monthly Magazine.

SKETCH OF THE CHARACTERS OF THE AMERICAN PRESIDENTS.

*Extracted from the Jesuit's Letters,
lately published in America.*

OF Washington what shall be said? Panegyric cannot be ex-